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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines the strategies of Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP) language research, and briefly reviews the findings through Spring 1974. A major research emphasis has been placed on the assessment of Standard English competence of Hawaii school children. (CM)

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The Kamehameha Early Education Program

The Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP) is a research and development program of The Kamehameha Schools/Bernice P. Bishop Estate. The mission of KEEP is the development, demonstration, and dissemination of methods for improving the education of Hawaiian and Part-Hawaiian children. These activities are conducted at the Ka Na'i Pono Research and Demonstration School, and in public classrooms in cooperation with the State Department of Education. KEEP projects and activities involve many aspects of the educational process, including teacher training, curriculum development, and child motivation, language, and cognition. More detailed descriptions of KEEP's history and operations are presented in Technical Reports #1-4.

Abstract

This paper outlines the strategies of KEEP language research, and briefly reviews the findings through Spring, 1974.

Technical Report #14
KEEP Language Research Strategy¹

Roland G. Tharp Ronald Gallimore

Achieving competence in Standard English by school children is an almost uniform goal of schools, parents, and the community of Hawaii. The KEEP position has been that Standard English (SE) should not replace Hawaiian Creole (HC), or Pidgin, but that SE should be learned as an alternate to be used when appropriate or advantageous.

Standard English competence is much lower for primarily HC-speaking Island children than for native SE-speaking (see Technical Report #15); SE instructional programs have been a concern of the DOE for sometime; and they have developed several notable programs (e.g., the Keaukaha model; the TESL model). KEEP must also address itself to this issue. Our research thus far has included a major effort to merely assess SE competence; without assessment, no research on program effectiveness can be done. In the Standard English Repetition Test (SERT), we now have such an instrument (see Technical Reports #5 and #15).

Linguistic competence is believed to be somewhat independent of an individual's specific language code. Assessment of our KEEP child-

¹ The positions in this paper have evolved from long working associations with many KEEP staff, including Steven T. Boggs, Gisela E. Speidel, Violet L. Mays, Carol Odo, and especially, Richard R. Day, Project Linguist.

ren on the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities (ITPA) details the relative strengths of several sub-categories of linguistic competence, and may reveal areas in which special instructions could be of profit.

Competence in HC is not uniform across all children either; some children are much more fluent in Pidgin than are others. It is quite possible that competence in one's primary language system may be a good predictor of ability to learn other things, including SE. For these purposes, we have begun work on developing a Hawaiian Creole Repetition Test (HCRT), as a companion test to the SERT. The SERT should be standardized in early 1975.

From data on the SERT, ITPA, and HCRT, we will be able to determine the correlates of linguistic variables with a variety of school achievement measures, such as reading ability, IQ, work rates, etc. Early reports on these intercorrelations are already available (see Technical Report #5); this line of inquiry will continue as a major KEEP effort, because it may reveal the importance, or lack of importance, of SE competence to general school achievement.

Opinion on this issue is sharply divided in educational circles. In its own right, is SE competence desirable to foster a more effective participation by Hawaiian people in the larger society? Or, is SE competence also necessary to profit from public education, which is conducted almost entirely in SE? Educational priorities obviously follow from the answers given to these questions, and in Hawaii--as elsewhere in the world--one finds advocates of programs at both extremes, from vigorous drill programs in SE, to curricular and materials revisions so that teaching will occur in HC.

The KEEP strategy is to investigate the correlates of various forms of linguistic competence. Only after we know exactly what difference language makes, can we decide what to do about language.

In the meantime, our other research lines are based on the assumption that bi-dialecticism will be the ultimate choice of the Hawaiian people and the Hawaiian educational system. A bi-dialectal child is one who has good competence in both HC and SE, and can select and switch codes according to appropriacy. To some degree, all KEEP children are now bi-dialectal, although HC vs. SE dominance varies widely across children.

But, if children are now bi-dialectal, what controls the code selected at a given moment? This question, in the domain of sociolinguistics, is important, because any instructional program will want to maximize the conditions for eliciting the code of choice. If use of language increases competence in a language, how can use of SE or HC be facilitated for instructional purposes? Indeed, what are the natural conditions which control the choice of dialect? This general line of inquiry has been important in KEEP since its first year, and Technical Reports on preliminary findings are in preparation.

Not only do social conditions (presence or absence of peers, teacher, family, etc.) affect the code chosen, but these social environments constitute the influence on language development. Island children hear HC from peers and/or families; they hear SE from TV, teachers, etc. Yet, we know little of the relative contribution to language development of any of these sources. We do not know, for example, to what degree the influence of an SE-speaking teacher, or an

SE instructional program, actually affects the use of SE in other settings. We have completed one study in this area, which demonstrates that there is very little transfer of SE learned in the classroom to settings outside the class. This report is in preparation, and a follow-up study will be performed in Spring of 1975.

We can be certain that the SE-speaking teacher provides only a minor contribution to the overall language environment of a child, even during school hours, where there are many more language transactions between children than between child and teacher. In an effort to detail this source of influence, we determined that children talk to each other randomly with respect to preferred language code; HC children are just as likely to talk to SE children, and vice versa, as to each other. Even sociometric choices, in K and 1st grades, at least, are determined overwhelmingly by same-sex choices, and not language type. These results are reported in Technical Report #16.

From this study, we can conclude that peer language influence in the school will be determined by the composition of the class itself; the HC vs. SE preferences in a given class will tend to at least perpetuate itself, and probably tend to move further toward the dominant code.

The importance of this kind of research for program development can be illustrated with the above examples. These studies lead us to believe that any language instructional program must occur in a peer-community setting so that the instruction will actually and immediately incorporate peer influences on one another.